

Middle-school kids see several alcohol ads a day

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Children as young as middle-schoolers are exposed to multiple alcohol advertisements every day—both indoors and out—a new study finds.

The study, published in the May issue of the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, found that kids ages 11 to 14 typically saw two to four alcohol [ads](#) per day.

And although television was often the source, outdoor ads—including billboards and signs outside stores and restaurants—were even more prominent in kids' lives.

The findings are concerning because studies indicate that ads may encourage underage drinking, said Rebecca L. Collins, Ph.D., a researcher with the RAND Corporation, in Santa Monica, Calif., who led the investigation.

"The evidence is strong that kids are at greater risk if they're exposed to alcohol advertising," Collins said.

Alcohol manufacturers are self-regulated when it comes to advertising: The industry has guidelines saying that ads should be limited to media that have a mostly adult audience, for instance.

The self-imposed industry guidelines also discourage placing ads near schools, playgrounds and churches, Collins pointed out.

Yet, her team found that middle-schoolers routinely saw alcohol marketing in their daily lives. That was especially true of Hispanic and African-American children, who saw an average of three and four ads per day, respectively.

White children came across two per day, on average.

"It's pretty disturbing that African-American kids saw twice as many ads," Collins said.

She also pointed to another striking finding: Girls saw 30 percent more ads than boys did—a difference that has not been seen in many prior studies.

According to Collins, that might reflect several trends. Traditionally, alcohol advertisers have heavily targeted TV sports, but in recent years, they've been branching out. Plus, more girls may be watching sports versus years past. Girls also typically read more magazines than boys do.

The findings were based on 589 11- to 14-year-olds living in and around Los Angeles. Over two weeks, the kids used handheld devices to record their encounters with [alcohol ads](#).

Overall, the study found that kids saw about three such ads per day. Outdoor billboards and signs were the most common source, accounting for 38 percent of all ads—followed by television at 26 percent.

According to Collins, the findings suggest that policymakers should pay more attention to outdoor alcohol advertising—which, she noted, is under local communities' control.

For parents, Collins said, the message is to "be aware" that kids are surrounded by [alcohol marketing](#)—and they do notice it.

"Just know that kids' decisions to drink don't suddenly come up in college," she said. "Young [kids](#) are being exposed to [alcohol](#) ads all the time, and that can influence them."

More information: Collins, R. L., Martino, S. C., Kovalchik, S. A., Becker, K. M., Shadel, W. G., & D'Amico, E. J. (May 2016). Alcohol advertising exposure among middle school-age youth: An assessment across all media and venues. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 77(3), 384-392. [DOI: 10.15288/jsad.2016.77.384](https://doi.org/10.15288/jsad.2016.77.384)

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